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Jeffery, Patricia; Jeffery, Roger; Jeffery, Craig

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## From Sir Syed to Sachar:

### Muslims and Education in rural Bijnor<sup>1</sup>

Patricia Jeffery, Roger Jeffery and Craig Jeffrey\*

#### *Introduction*

The publication of the Sachar Committee report in late 2006 marked a watershed in discussions of the position of Muslims in contemporary India. For one thing, the report showed that Muslims in contemporary India are, on the whole, worse off than OBCs: for instance, in regard to levels of poverty, living conditions, access to secure and well-paid employment and achievements in the field of formal education (Sachar, 2006: 237). But on some indicators, and in some States (particularly the large Muslim-minority States of West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Assam) ‘the situation [of Muslims] is particularly grave’ (Sachar, 2006: 237). In addition, the report draws attention to many misconceptions in the public understanding of aspects of Muslim everyday life in India, for example by noting the relatively small proportion of Muslim children who rely wholly on *madrasahs* for their formal education. Nonetheless, the detailed tables in the Appendices to the Report show that on some educational indicators—such as proportions of the population completing at least Middle School—indicators for Muslims in UP and West Bengal are now well below those for SC/ST populations. Elsewhere in north India, Muslims are still somewhat better placed on these indicators than SC/ST populations, but the differentials between them are shrinking fast (Sachar, 2006: 297-8).

About a quarter of Indian Muslims live in UP—over thirty million or just under 18.5 per cent of the State’s total population in 2001—and the conditions under which they strive to earn their livelihood and rear their children can thus provide crucial insights into social and economic development in UP as a whole. In UP, rural Muslims have an average monthly expenditure per person that is 97 per cent of that of Hindus, whilst in urban areas, Muslim expenditures are only 73 per cent of those of urban Hindus (John & Mutatkar, 2005: 1341). Muslim town-dwellers tend to inhabit particular residential areas and are especially associated with artisanal activities such as weaving and metal work. Rural Muslims are generally middle or poor peasants, landless agricultural labourers or semi-skilled labourers (mechanics, weavers, etc.). According to the 2001 Census, only 38 per cent of Muslims over the age of 6 are literate, compared to 46 per cent in UP as a whole (Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India, 2002; Sachar, 2006: 158-60; see also Shariff, 1995).

In this paper, we draw upon fieldwork carried out periodically since the early 1980s in Bijnor district, in north-western UP to illuminate the national and State-level pictures provided

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the National Seminar on “Economic, Political and Social Transformation in India since 1857 with special reference to Uttar Pradesh and Bihar” held at the Giri Institute of Development Studies, Lucknow in March 2007 and funded by the ICSSR. We are grateful to Professor A. K. Singh, who organised the seminar, for permission to publish our paper here.

\* (Patricia Jeffery ([p.jeffery@ed.ac.uk](mailto:p.jeffery@ed.ac.uk)) and Roger Jeffery ([r.jeffery@ed.ac.uk](mailto:r.jeffery@ed.ac.uk)) are at the Centre for South Asian Studies, School of Social and Political Studies, University of Edinburgh, Scotland and Craig Jeffrey ([cj3@u.washington.edu](mailto:cj3@u.washington.edu)) is at the Department of Geography, Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, and South Asia Center, University of Washington, Seattle, U.S.)

by the Sachar and other reports, through a detailed analysis of Muslims' educational status at a local level. The first portion of the paper locates the contemporary material in a longer time-frame. Taking 1857—and Syed Ahmad Khan's presence in Bijnor at the time—as our starting point, we sketch out some of the subsequent developments that were crucial in setting the direction for educational provision in UP, and Bijnor in particular, in the post-1947 period. Thus we point to the responses of the Muslim élites to the events of 1857, in particular the soul-searching that culminated, on the one hand, in the 'Aligarh' movement—in which Sir Syed, of course, was a central actor—and, on the other hand, in the 'revivalist' movement associated with the *Daru'l 'Ulum madrasah* in Deoband. Contemporary educational provision, however, needs also to be viewed in the light of responses by Hindu élites to 1857, in particular the growth of the 'Hindi' movement and the predominant position of Hindu élites in the educational bureaucracy in the UP government in the inter-war period. All these aspects of educational politics fed into the character of the school facilities that have been available in UP since 1947. After outlining some general features of educational provision in UP, we focus on primary schooling provision, secondary schooling and rising privatisation in Bijnor district, in order to ask (in the final section) if the *madrasahs* that have become increasingly popular amongst our rural Muslim informants represent positive choices for religious education or least worst options.

### ***Muslim Élites and Education after 1857***

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a geographically-mobile Muslim service élite had consolidated its position in north India. They came from families with traditions of Islamic and legal learning and were over-represented in lucrative employment in the colonial administration, taking postings in different parts of British India. Yet they generally retained their links to their places of origin, typically *qasbas*, or country towns, which they often dominated by virtue of being significant landowners (Bayly, 1983: 346-368 and 449-457). One such person was Syed Ahmad Khan, a middle-ranking East India Company official, who was posted to Bijnor in 1857. In 1774 Bijnor, then ruled by Zabita Khan, had been ceded to the British East India Company by the Nawab of Oudh. Bijnor was somewhat cut off (by the Ganges and the Yamuna) from what happened some eighty years later in 1857 in Meerut and Delhi, and neither insurgent rebel soldiers nor the returning British army paid it much attention. Yet, according to Syed Ahmed Khan's account of the events of 1857, the period leading up to 1<sup>st</sup> June was a period of great uncertainty. He suggests that Zabita Khan's grandson, the Nawab of Najibabad, somewhat reluctantly took the opportunity to restore his family pride and its dominant position in the area by occupying Bijnor town and raising the standard of revolt when the British were at their lowest ebb (Ahmad Khan, 1972 [1858]).<sup>2</sup> The other local leaders—mainly Hindus—who opposed him did so more in a spirit of defending their own rights and privileges than because they sided with the absent British. After Delhi fell to the British in September 1857, the eventual outcome of the struggle in Bijnor was never in doubt. British troops arrived to the district in April 1858, defeated the Nawab in an insignificant battle at Nagina, and restored British authority in the district.

Syed Ahmad Khan drew on his Bijnor experiences in his commentary, in which he was unusually frank in suggesting that the British themselves—especially through their failure

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<sup>2</sup> The English translation of his book is entitled: "*Syed Ahmad Khan's History of the Bijnor Rebellion*", and Appendix A is entitled "The causes of the Indian revolt". The original Urdu title is "*Sarkashi-yi zila' Bijnaur: ma' tafsihi halat-i musannif va ta'liqat*".

to provide for the descendants of previous élites—had been contributory causes of the revolt throughout north India. According to his account, the local zamindars in Bijnor had divided along religious lines. Muslim landowners led the revolt in the district, but apparently diverted into attacking Hindu Jat and Bishnoi villages; Muslim artisans attacked Hindu landlords and traders in the towns. Jats and Rajputs then retaliated against Muslims, thus acting in the British interest (Ahmad Khan, 1972 [1858]). But, when it comes to issues of Hindu-Muslim disputes and differences, Syed Ahmad Khan's version, like the Gazetteers, stressed pre-British hostilities and the calming role of British rule (Pandey, 1990). Thus the Bijnor Gazetteer forthrightly concluded that a "strong line of cleavage ... developed from the first between Hindu and Musalman. The distinction of faith led immediately to the formation of rival and markedly antagonistic parties" (Nevill, 1928 (1907)). Syed Ahmed Khan's view was that "Before this fighting there had never been a dispute, nor feelings of hostility nor even a religious altercation, between Hindus and Muslims of this District" but that after fighting in Sherkot in August 1857, "the tree of Hindu-Muslim aversion ... became tall and too firmly rooted to be dug out" (Ahmad Khan, 1972 [1858]: 40, 47; see also Bayly, 1983: 365). Syed Ahmed Khan's account of the divisions between Muslims and Hindus is somewhat belied by the subsequent reallocations of land holdings by the British, when taking land from those who had rebelled against them and distributing it amongst their supporters: the largest losers were Rajputs, then Pathans, Sayids and Sheikhs; the largest winners were also Rajputs, then Brahmans, Ragas, Baniyas and Jats followed by Pathans, Saiyids and Ahirs (Jeffery & Jeffery, 1994).

Nonetheless, the events of 1857-58 in Bijnor resulted in the serious weakening of the Muslim élite in the district. After 1857, they lost their political figurehead—the deposed Mughal emperor—and the role of Islamic specialists [*qāẓī*, *ʿulamā*] in the colonial government's legal work declined. Over the following century, like other towns in Rohilkhand and the Upper Doab, Bijnor town was slowly transformed from a *qasba* into a *ganj* (one dominated by Hindu merchants, with close relationships to an increasingly Hindu civil service) (Bayly, 1983; Freitag, 1989: 102-3). Throughout north India, a widespread perception amongst the Muslim élite was that they were suffering a serious decline. Historians have argued about the accuracy of this perception, with Brass considering that this was not happening in north India (Brass, 1974; Brass, 1991), while both Bayly and Robinson see a decline, at least for some sectors of the Muslim élite (Bayly, 1983: 356; see also Brass, 1977 for his response to Robinson; Robinson, 1977). Yet Bayly and Robinson would seem to agree with Brass that debates about religious reform (as well as about the role of Urdu in education) were defensive attempts by an entrenched Muslim élite to protect their privileges against encroachments by increasingly assertive Hindu élites. As many writers have indicated, the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a wave of public debate, pamphlets and so forth addressing the reasons behind what the Muslim élites saw as a severe turn for the worse in their fortunes. For the most part, there was little in the way of what might have been construed as seditious critiques of the social, political and economic dislocations caused by British colonialism: perhaps the earlier oppositional stance of the Tariqa-e Muhammadiyya led by Sayyid Ahmad Bareilwi had already provided one cautionary tale (Hardy, 1972: especially Chapter 2; Sanyal, 1996: especially Chapter 8). Rather, political quietude and victim-blaming was the common response, with the soul-searching turning inwards and responsibility for Muslims' supposed plight being laid—in some way or other—at the feet of Muslims themselves. Here we shall home in on just two aspects of this that are crucial for understanding the educational status of Muslims in contemporary Bijnor: the Aligarh movement and the establishment of the *Darū'l 'Ulūm* seminary at Deoband.

One strand of thinking was associated with the ‘modernists’ of the Aligarh movement (Ahmad, 1967; Hasan, 1998; Lelyveld, 1978). After 1857, Syed Ahmad Khan apparently never returned to Bijnor, but moved onto a national stage where he set about advocating modern education for Muslims. His engagement with educational development began with founding a school in Moradabad, the next district to the south of Bijnor. But he is primarily remembered now for his crucial role in establishing the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh in 1875. Syed Ahmad Khan and the other Aligarh ‘modernists’ generally favoured English education (alongside Urdu) as a means of enabling élite Muslims to continue accessing employment with the British authorities. In other words, rather than turning their back on the employment opportunities provided by British supremacy, Muslims should engage with the world that the British represented, just as the Hindu élites were doing. It was not that Muslims were to abandon their religion, however. Rather, the Aligarh ‘modernists’ advocated the reinterpretation of ‘non-core’ aspects of Islam—needless to say, defining these was highly contentious—in the light of contemporary social and scientific knowledge.

Another stance was represented by the ‘revivalists’ of the *Daru’l ‘Ulum madrasah* in Deoband. After the British had reclaimed Delhi in 1857, among the Muslim intelligentsia compelled to flee the city were the founders of the Deoband seminary, established in 1867 in Saharanpur district (some 60 km away from Bijnor, to the west of the Ganges). Central to their activities was the belief that Muslims had been eclipsed because of their failure to match up to the requirements of Islam. The Deoband ‘revivalists’ emphasised the centrality of personal reform that was to be based on a return to the early texts and the traditions of the Prophet, which were by then available in Urdu. Individual believers were held responsible for obtaining correct religious knowledge and for putting this knowledge to use in their everyday lives (Metcalf, 1982).<sup>3</sup>

The distinction between Aligarh and Deoband should not be overdrawn, however. Syed Ahmad Khan and his close associates were well-versed in Islamic matters: for instance, Nazir Ahmad (born in Bijnor and famed for his improving fiction such as *The Bride’s Mirror* [*Mirāt ul-‘Arūs*]) and the poet Hāli were both allied with the ‘modernism’ of the Aligarh movement, and both had had extensive Islamic religious education.<sup>4</sup> Further, men connected with Deoband were sometimes employed in Aligarh, for instance the son-in-law of one of the Deoband founders was appointed ‘dean’ at Aligarh in 1893 (Lelyveld, 1978: 192).

Despite their theological differences, ‘revivalist’ and ‘modernist’ thinkers saw education as the main means of rescuing Indian Muslims from their plight. Certainly, women as mothers were regarded as key to these endeavours, but the formal educational facilities they established, at least in the early days, catered only for men, primarily from the landed élites at Aligarh and from the intelligentsia, the urban and (in time) the rural non-élites at Deoband.

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the various traditionalist movements, see Ahmad (1967) and Hardy (1972). See also Metcalf (1990) on Ashraf Ali Thanawi: he was closely associated with Deoband and worked at one of its offshoot *madrasahs*, the *Mazābir-i ‘Ulum* in Saharanpur.

<sup>4</sup> For more on Nazir Ahmad see Ahmad (2001 [1903]), Naim (1984), and Pritchett (2001). For more on Hali, see Minault (1983, 1986a, 1986b). See also Jeffery et al. (2004).

### ***Hindi ascendancy and Urdu decline***

Meanwhile, economic and political changes in western UP were tending to favour Hindu urban élites, particularly where Hindu merchant corporations benefited from the enhanced trade that had resulted from railway construction, increasing sales of agricultural produce because of expanding canal irrigation, and the rise in military purchasing after 1857 (Bayly, 1983: 427-457). The introduction of modest electoral politics at the municipality level was advantageous for Hindu traders and moneylenders, rather than Hindu members of the Urdu service gentry (Robinson, 1993: 46 ff.). During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the 20<sup>th</sup>, these Hindu urban élites were developing their own agenda for reform and improvement, including assertively demanding the use of Devanagari script in official business. The development of this 'Hindi movement' is also crucial for understanding the educational status of Muslims in contemporary UP.

Brass comments that Hindus and Muslims in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century had used different languages for speaking to their deities but a common language for communicating with one another. Initially, the language debates were largely a matter of different scripts—Devanagari and Persian—but Hindi and Urdu gradually became 'symbolic links among members of the same ethnic group, barriers to communication between members of different ethnic groups, and additional marks of identity and separateness for such groups' (Brass, 1991: 85). By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Urdu had become an important symbol of Muslim culture and Islam for north Indian Muslims—whilst a government resolution in 1900 first permitted the use of Devanagari in official business. As Orsini documents, by about 1930 Hindi in Devanagari script had ousted Urdu in Persian script from its prime position among the vernacular languages used in official business and in publications, largely due to the efforts of the 'Hindi establishment' to expand the numbers of publications in Devanagari script (Orsini, 2002). Such was the dominance of the 'Hindi establishment' that there was little support for Gandhi's advocacy of 'Hindustani' as a mass language that combined Hindi and Urdu (Brass, 1974: 135-136; Lelyveld, 2002). Nevertheless, Urdu remained an official language in UP in the British period.

Since 1947, however, Partition has cast a long shadow over the language issue, with the heated debate over Hindi and Urdu in the UP Legislative Council in September 1947 setting the tone for later developments (Kudaisya, 2006: 366-380).<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, many Hindus and some Muslims were bitter about Partition, which they blamed on the Muslim élites, and Urdu came to be perceived as an alien language and a threat to national unity. On the other hand, the Muslim élites in the region had disproportionately opted for Pakistan in 1947—whether those associated with the Aligarh movement who went at or soon after Partition, or the later exodus of the landed élites because of zamindari abolition in the 1950s—which reduced the impact of those arguing in support of Urdu. Consequently, since 1947, Urdu has suffered a precipitate decline from its earlier prominence in north Indian public life, more so in UP than in Bihar (Sonntag, 1996). Urdu ceased to be an official language of UP in 1951 and was relegated to 'minority language' status, even though Muslims were (and still are) the largest religious minority in UP. The repeated efforts by organisations

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<sup>5</sup> For more on debates about Urdu, Hindi and Hindustani see King (1994) and Rai (2001).

<sup>6</sup> For more on the wider aspects of communal politics and the position of Urdu in post-1947 UP, see Abdullah (2002), Ahmad (2002), Brass (1974, 1990, 1991), Farouqui (1994), Latifi (1999), Pai (2002), Rahman (2002), Russell (1999), and Venkatachaliah (1999).

such as Anjuman Taraqqi-e Urdu and Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat to get Urdu recognised as UP's second official language have met with inertia and even resistance from the UP state, as well as legal interventions from Hindi language advocates such as the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. And, meanwhile, Sanskritised Hindi has been increasingly dominant in the public sphere in UP, where it is the official language and is now an essential qualification for obtaining white-collar employment.

Language politics in the education sector, moreover, has several features that have touched particularly on Muslim children. During the 1920s and 1930s, many leading members of Congress in UP—even socialists like Sampurnanand—were active in the Hindi movement and played central roles in relation to education, especially curriculum development and the expansion of Hindi teaching in schools and colleges. Others were involved in publishing houses (with clear financial interests in gaining contracts for textbook publication) (Orsini, 2002). After the 1936 Government of India Act, Congress became willing to take positions within government, and from 1938 to 1942 Sampurnanand was the first Congress UP Minister of Education. The proposals contained in the Wardha Scheme were key in flagging the centrality of Hindi in Devanagari script and of Hindu ethics as the core of Indian secularism that was to be conveyed to schoolchildren—and they evoked a widespread sense amongst Muslims that the proposed ethical education was Hindu in orientation rather than secular (Gould, 2002; Österheld, 2007). Nevertheless, through the 1940s and early 1950s Sampurnanand (for most of this time UP Minister for Education) and Purushottam Das Tandon 'persistently championed the causes of Hindi versus Urdu, Hindu social reform, Hindu cultural revivalism and Congress Socialism' (Gould, 2002: 632). In 1953, Hindi was designated the only language for use in instruction and examination in the UP high school curriculum (Kudaisya, 2006: 378). The upshot has been the 'institutional stranglehold' (Orsini, 2002: 382) by the upper-caste Hindu-dominated Hindi establishment over education—whether at the level of ministries or in the teaching cadres—that has ossified UP Education Board Hindi literature courses, in which highly Sanskritised Hindi is emphasised.

From one angle, this can be read as an exclusionary class project that marginalises and denigrates the vernacular non-élite forms of Hindi that are spoken by most villagers and the poor (Kumar, 1991, 1993; Orsini, 2002; Rai, 2001). Yet the association of Sanskrit with the Hindu scriptures and the use of narratives of Indian history, mythology and Hindi literature in which Muslims are portrayed in a negative light in school textbooks have an impact on Muslim children over and above the narrowly linguistic. Indeed, the Hindu bias of the syllabus<sup>7</sup> has long been a matter of concern to Muslim commentators (see, for instance, Brass, 1974). Several government committees investigated the role of Urdu teaching in schools at all levels (e.g. the Kripalani and Gujral Committees, established in 1961 and 1972 respectively). Despite Constitutional guarantees of 'mother tongue' teaching for minorities at primary school level, Urdu is now marginal in the UP curriculum.<sup>8</sup> Under the 'three language formula' as applied to UP (Hindi, English and another Indian language), Urdu might have achieved some prominence in school curricula, but Sanskrit is generally taken as the third language. Urdu as a

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<sup>7</sup> The debates about the saffronisation of textbooks and school syllabi more generally, however, focused on History, Social Science, and Vedic Mathematics and Astrology rather than Hindi as such see SAHMAT (2001, 2002a, 2002b).

<sup>8</sup> It is as problematic, however, to regard Urdu as the language exclusively of Muslims as to assume that it is the 'mother tongue' of all Muslim children in UP, although that seems to be the assumption behind much writing on this subject.

literary subject—including fiction and poetry—is rarely an option in secondary schools. As *a medium of instruction*, Urdu is now largely restricted to the *madrasah* sector. Some commentators talk of ‘step-motherly’ [sic] treatment of Urdu by the state, others criticise Muslim urban élites for complacency, political naivety and abandoning Urdu in favour of Hindi for their own children’s education. For whatever reason—murder, suicide or both (Rahman, 2002: 234-235)—Urdu has been a casualty in the post-1947 period.

This has not been a straight contest between Hindu and Urdu, however. Throughout the colonial period, English had the prestige of the language used in the upper reaches of the colonial administration. In the immediate post-1947 period, English presented policy dilemmas, as an international language, yet part of the colonial heritage. Given the problems of determining a single national language for India, English occupied that position (initially, only as an interim measure) (Brass, 1990: 135 ff.). In practice, English—as the language of upward mobility in the employment market in India and abroad—has exercised a crucial influence on educational provision. In the most recent past, this has been more because of the growing non-state educational sector, than because of pro-active government policy. Parents with high ambitions for their children want to ensure their fluency in English—and the private market in schooling caters to this demand. English-medium schools—as distinct from Hindi-medium schools in which English is taught—generally charge much higher fees than Hindi medium schools. In the language stakes, then, Urdu has been marginalised not only by Sanskritised Hindi but also by English.

### ***Education policy in late colonial and post-Independence UP***

We shall not elaborate further on the impact of the ‘Hindi movement’ on curriculum development and on the ambience of UP schools (see Jeffery et al. 2005b, 2007a for more on this topic). Rather, we focus here on other aspects of educational provision in UP that also reflect the impact of the ‘Hindi establishment’ on UP government policy. In particular, we outline the role of locally dominant sectors of the population in determining the pattern of schooling provision in UP. This, we contend, is an important manifestation of ‘institutional communalism’: the normal everyday procedures of institutions that insidiously—and not necessarily with any direct intent to discriminate by the actors involved—result in and perpetuate deeply embedded systematic inequalities (Jeffery and Jeffery 2006). The unevenness and diversity of educational provision in contemporary UP, we suggest, is one example of these broader processes that have had adverse effects on the educational status of the weakest and poorest sections in general, with disproportionate effects on Muslims (as well as Dalits and girls).

With the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, issues of local self-government became prominent in Indian politics. Among other changes, education became a provincial responsibility. There were ongoing debates about the representation of different groups in the UP provincial civil services and by the late 1920s, it ‘was generally decided to use broad principles of maintaining a balance of 60:30:10 between Hindus, Muslims and other minorities’ (Gould, 2007), although different districts and different government departments had different proportions of Muslims and Hindus. As Gould notes, in the pre-1947 period,

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<sup>9</sup> Deshpande (2000) Mohan (2000) and Srivastava (2000), for instance, focus on Hindi in relation to English. Indeed, Faust and Nagar (2001) see English-medium schools as both socially and politically divisive.



bureaucratic recruitment was essentially about the exercise of local power and specific local caste and community interests could sometimes 'capture' the state (or at least some branches of the state apparatus). Crucially for the education sector, individuals involved in the Hindi movement were often employed by the British in education administration (Orsini, 2002).

Moreover, following patterns established in the inter-war period, the UP 'developmental' state since 1947 has accorded education a low priority in its spending, and schooling provision has never been sufficient to provide education for all the children within its territory. This has resulted in competition over the allocation of very scarce resources in which politically and economically dominant groups have been able to obtain disproportionate access to government education investments, with corresponding exclusion of the weaker sections of society.

For instance, decisions about where to locate government primary schools were not based simply on population size and 'need', but tended to reinforce existing patterns of exclusion and privilege. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Hindu urban middle classes and dominant landowning castes were more successful in influencing the location of primary schools via their connections (often through relatives) into an educational officialdom dominated by upper caste Hindus. Like the lower Hindu castes and the Dalits, Muslims did not have such ready means of leverage over the 'Hindi establishment'. Rural primary schools were more likely to be constructed first in villages or sections of villages dominated by Hindu upper castes than near Muslim or Dalit majority villages or neighbourhoods. These decisions provided children from the Hindu upper castes with early advantages (Banerjee & Somanathan, 2006). By the 1990s, ample evidence had also accumulated of the UP state's abject failure to provide comprehensive, accessible, affordable, and good quality primary schools (Govinda, 2002; The Probe Team, 1999). In the face of growing cohorts of school age children, there were too few government primary schools and teachers to meet the potential demand. Rural primary schools in particular remained insufficient in number, and were least well resourced, with their buildings and teaching materials are more inadequate than in urban schools. High levels of teacher absenteeism and shirking compounded the general problem of recruiting staff for rural posts. In practice, too, government primary schools were rarely providing free education.

Until the late 1980s the UP government seems to have been committed to trying to provide most, if not all, secondary schooling itself or through schools that it subsidised. At least since 1991, however, State responsibility for the funding and management of secondary schooling has been steadily undermined, although even from 1975 or so, it had been hard for new government-aided schools to open, because the UP government was faced with recurrent fiscal crises. It was unwilling to grant recognition to new secondary schools, because it foresaw future calls for additional subsidies. Since 1991, however, unaided secondary schools have been more readily granted state recognition but only if they give an explicit commitment not to seek funding in future—and since then unaided schools have been providing the main engine of growth in secondary schooling. In UP as a whole, between 1978 and 1993 the number of government secondary schools more than doubled (from 724 to 1558) and the number of aided schools rose by 15 per cent (from 3847 to 4446). In the same period, unaided secondary schools—normally relying on fees and other levies (e.g. 'donations' to obtain admission)—nearly trebled in number (from 298 to 840) (Kingdon & Muzammil, 2001). Founders are mindful of locating schools where they can expect to remain afloat financially, so unaided private and government-aided schools are few and far between in the rural areas (Drèze & Gazdar, 1997: 71; NCERT, 1997: Table V41), and tend not to be sited in

predominantly Muslim (or Dalit) areas, in part because they are disproportionately located in the lowest rungs of the urban and rural class hierarchies (Shariff, 1995). The upshot is that government and non-state schools alike, particularly secondary schools, have tended to be constructed disproportionately in or near areas dominated by caste Hindus (NCERT, 1997: Table V17), where there are sufficient concentrations of urban middle class families, or wealthy families from the immediate hinterland.

The biases in the provision of primary and secondary schooling, whether government, government-aided or non-state, have been exacerbated by the accumulated impact of teachers' salaries at the expense of developing educational curricula and facilities (Kingdon & Muzammil, 2003). Between 1960 and 1990, teachers' unions pressurised the state government to take over the funding of teachers' salaries in aided schools (a trend reversed, especially in the secondary sector, since 1991). The salaries of teachers still on the government payroll—overwhelmingly upper caste Hindu—now account for the lion's share of the education budget, especially since the pay rises mandated by the 5<sup>th</sup> pay commission. This skewing of the education budget, Kingdon and Muzammil argue, has subsidised the urban middle classes at the expense of expanding schooling for the rural population and the poor (Kingdon & Muzammil, 2001).

In sum, then, the provision of formal education in UP is inadequate on several counts, quantitative and qualitative alike. Historically, state funding has failed to provide 'education for all' and, by the 1990s, real per capita expenditure on education by the UP state was declining, as were the numbers of teachers per capita (Drèze & Gazdar, 1997; Drèze & Sen, 2002: 143-188; Srivastava, 2001; The Probe Team, 1999). Moreover, the increasing role of the market since the early 1990s has failed to erode the long-established class and communal biases in access to schooling. In the remainder of this paper, we explore how these general features play out in one specific setting: Bijnor district in north-western UP.

### ***Bijnor District***

Bijnor District is one of UP's north-western districts, located to the east of the River Ganges as it emerges from the Himalayan foothills, about 100 miles north-east of Delhi. On most criteria of economic development, Bijnor District is rather more 'developed' than the districts of central or eastern UP. Its social indicators, however, are much lower than would be expected from its economic ranking. In regard to educational infrastructure, for instance, Bijnor ranked 57<sup>th</sup> of the 63 districts in UP, a state with one of the poorest showings in India (Singh, 2001: Table VIII.3). Adult literacy rates in UP as a whole (43 per cent of women and 70 per cent of men) are lower than the all-India rates (54 per cent of women and 76 per cent of men). According to 2001 Census data (Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India, 2002), Bijnor District literacy rates for females aged 7 or above were slightly better than the UP figures, at 47 per cent, while those for men were almost exactly the same as those for UP as a whole.

The Bijnor countryside is intensively cultivated, and has benefited from assured water supplies since 1965, mainly using private tube-well irrigation. Improved varieties of sugarcane, wheat and rice are the overwhelmingly dominant crops. There is also little large-scale manufacturing industry in the main towns of Bijnor district—apart from sugar processing—and nothing comparable to the extensive ribbon development of industrial activities in the Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut-Muzaffarnagar corridor. Nevertheless, the completion of the

Madhya Ganga Barrage across the Ganges near Bijnor town in the mid 1980s enhanced trading and communication opportunities to Delhi, Meerut and Muzaffarnagar.

Government employment opportunities in Bijnor district have been concentrated in health, schooling, transport, and the police. Since 1991, the liberalisation of the Indian economy has reduced openings in these spheres without creating a viable source of secure private salaried employment. Partly as a consequence, the number of salaried jobs in Bijnor district declined sharply in relation to the demand from high school matriculates in the 1980s and 1990s. At the same time, Bijnor district's gradual absorption into broader processes of commercialisation in western UP has been creating *some* opportunities for young people to enter 'service type' work, mainly in marketing, private educational institutions, telecommunication, health care, or finance. Most of these jobs, however, are poorly paid, insecure, and temporary in nature. A growing shortage of secure salaried employment in Bijnor district partly explains the vigorous opposition to the 1990 decision to extend positive discrimination to OBCs—manifested in a wave of roadblocks, civil disturbances, and vandalism perpetrated by upper and intermediate caste students (Jeffery & Jeffery, 1997).

Bijnor district has a relatively large Muslim population. Overall, about 42 per cent of the population was Muslim, 35 per cent was caste Hindu and 21 per cent was Scheduled Caste, with the rest Sikhs and small numbers of Christians and Buddhists. As in several other districts in western UP, the towns of Bijnor District often have a Muslim majority, with 67 per cent of the urban population in 2001, although the new suburbs of the bigger towns—which are not necessarily defined as 'urban' for census purposes—are often dominated by Hindus. In the Bijnor urban agglomeration, for instance, Hindus probably now outnumber Muslims, since Hindus (Government servants and professionals, as well as wealthy farmers) dominate the new suburbs, though Muslims probably still dominate the area controlled by the Municipal Board. Unusually, however, the district has a relatively large proportion of *rural* Muslims—about 34 per cent in 2001 (Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India, 2002). Some villages in Bijnor District are dominated by particular Hindu castes and others have no substantial settlements of Muslims, many have evenly balanced Hindu and Muslim populations and yet others are exclusively or largely Muslim.

There are distinctive and separate Muslim institutions and class and caste structures, to a greater degree than in areas where Muslims are few in number. Bijnor Muslims, then, are diverse and located in a range of class positions, from (mainly small) landowners and businessmen to landless labourers, from cattle traders to barbers and midwives. Nevertheless, in line with other studies of Muslims in UP, Muslims in Bijnor district are under-represented among the more affluent sectors and over-represented amongst the poor. Indeed, Muslims in Bijnor district are much weaker politically than their numbers would suggest: Brahmans dominate trade and commerce, while Jats and Rajputs dominate agriculture and small-scale rural industries (like sugar production); and the Dalits have access to several government schemes and also benefit locally because Bijnor is a 'reserved constituency' in national elections. Mayavati, a leader of the BSP, represented the seat in the 1980s. In the 1991 national elections the parliamentary constituency was won by the BJP, who retained it in 1996 and 1998, but lost it to the combined candidate of the SP and Rashtriya Lok Dal in 2004. In the UP State Assembly elections, after a clean sweep of all seven Bijnor seats in 1991, the BJP lost ground to other parties: in 2002 the BJP held only 3 seats, with two going to the SP and one each to the BSP and the Communist Party of India. Members of Parliament and of the UP State Assembly can be very important channels of resources: having a link to a successful politician can make a major difference to one's chances of getting or keeping a job, a

scholarship, or admission to public facilities like hospitals. This, then, is the context in which we explore the question of Muslim education in the district.

### ***Educational provision in contemporary Bijnor***

In the following three sections of the paper, we explore the current educational status of Muslims in Bijnor district and address some of the reasons behind the patterns that we outline. We consider the current position of Muslim children in different forms of schooling, and ask whether there is evidence of exclusionary practices by the state and other important actors. As part of the context, we note that most schools are Hindi-medium, and their textbooks and lessons exhibit 'banal Hinduism', the taken-for-granted yet insidious practices that tend to construct an upper caste Hindu ambience (cf. Billig, 1995). In most schools—government and private alike—daily assemblies and other functions, such as Founders' Days and January 26<sup>th</sup> celebrations, are replete with Hindu iconography and Sanskritised Hindi (cf. Bénéï, 2000). In Bijnor town there are several schools founded by Muslim or mixed religion committees, but Urdu is offered only in the three largest Muslim-run institutions and a few other schools, as either the second or the third language. In other words, virtually all state and non-state schools have marked class and urban biases in access, and a widespread Hindu ambience. Here we consider primary, secondary and *madrasah* education separately.

#### *Primary Schooling: convergence with residualisation*

This part of the paper develops some insights on the relationships between social structure and the provision of public goods discussed both by the Sachar Committee Report (Sachar, 2006: 16) and by economists (Banerjee & Somanathan, 2006). Using a data set of public resources of various kinds (but particularly related to health, water and education) for 500 constituencies across India, Banerjee and Somanathan 'ask whether the data provide evidence of convergence in the availability of public goods across the country reflecting the fulfillment of stated agendas or whether these attempts were frustrated by powerful communities appropriating the additional facilities' (2006: 1). They conclude that between 1971 and 1991 'The most striking difference in our estimates for the two census years relates to gains registered by the Scheduled Castes relative to other groups' (2006: 24). By comparison, 'Muslims, who have long been recognized as socially disadvantaged but have never been the recipients of state-led affirmative action do not seem to have benefitted in the same way' (2006: 28). But as they also point out, their conclusions with respect to the improvement of the position of Dalits may be too optimistic:

Convergence has taken place in outcomes that are relatively easy to deliver. Schools are easy to build and new buildings and more teachers can offer bureaucrats opportunities to distribute patronage. Hiring good teachers or getting them to teach well is harder. A similar analysis of the welfare outcomes that are affected by these public goods might suggest a very different picture, because, for example, empty school buildings do not improve education (2006: 28).

The Sachar Committee also uses Census data to estimate the effects of Muslim populations on the availability of schools (amongst other facilities such as a health clinic or good road). It concludes that 'there is a clear and significant inverse correlation between the proportion of the Muslim population and the availability of educational infrastructure in small villages' (Sachar, 2006: 143). In UP, the effect of Muslim proportions on the availability of schools in small villages is more marked than in most of the rest of the country (pp. 143-144).

Our own data from Bijnor allow us to address similar issues, with respect to schooling, but with the benefit of being able to avoid some of the possible ‘ecological fallacies’ in the arguments of Sachar and of Banerjee and Somanathan. That is, by combining Census data with school-level data we can more directly assess whether Muslims themselves have inferior access to school facilities. We are also able to look in slightly more detail at the characteristics of the schools themselves. In preparation for the introduction of District Primary Education Project [DPEP] in Bijnor in 2001, the *Basic Shiksha Adhikari* (Primary Education Office) [BSA] collected data on primary school characteristics (numbers of rooms, distance from town, water supply, toilet facilities, and boundary walls, for example), enrolled pupil characteristics (by gender, caste and community) and numbers of teachers in post, compared to the full complement.<sup>10</sup> In addition, we collected information on village populations and Dalit proportions from the 1971 District Census Handbook, and data on village caste profiles in two Community Development Blocks (Haldaur and Mohammedpur Deomal, adjacent to Bijnor town) from the 2001 census. For numbers of Muslims or OBCs by village we asked local political actors and journalists (with detailed knowledge of the larger villages) to estimate proportions for all villages with a 1971 population of 500 or over. These estimates were cross-checked (but are vulnerable to unknown error factors). Nevertheless, we think they are robust enough for our purposes here, especially since the pupil enrolment data and the village population data produce very similar results.

In general, the 2001 DPEP district-level data produce a picture of the poor quality of government primary schools in Bijnor that is similar to those provided for UP (and much of the rest of north India) by larger-scale surveys. Out of 1476 schools in the district, each supposed to provide five years of schooling,

- 78 had no rooms, nor toilets, nor water supply
- 48 had no rooms, but did have a toilet and/or water supply (most commonly a hand-pump)
- 98 had 1 room, most with either toilet facilities or a water supply
- 1056 had two rooms, most with either toilet facilities or a water supply
- 196 had 3 or more rooms

There were 3502 teachers, and 840 (24 per cent) vacancies, leading to a pupil-teacher ratio of 73 and an average of fewer than two teachers per school in post. The average pupil enrolment per school was over 170. In 344 schools the pupil-teacher ratio was 100 or above, with a maximum of 437; on the other hand, in 48 schools no pupils were recorded.

Statistical analysis of these datasets confirms the picture we had gained through our detailed studies of the four villages where we have worked in Bijnor district, anecdotal evidence gained from short visits to other villages, and comments from married village women who had been brought up in other villages in the area. We excluded the schools without students. In the remaining 1435 primary schools in the district there is a clear negative correlation between the proportion of pupils who are Muslims and the likelihood of teacher posts being filled (Pearson’s  $R = -0.23$ ), but there is no relationship for Dalit pupil proportions ( $R = 0.05$ ) (see Table 1). There is no clear relationship between the number of facilities a school has (a scale created by totalling the number of rooms, and adding one for

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<sup>10</sup> We are grateful to the then District Magistrate of Bijnor for making these data available to us.

each of toilet, drinking water, and boundary wall) and either the proportion of Muslim pupils ( $R = 0.024$ ) or of Dalit pupils ( $R = 0.034$ ) (Table 2).

**Table 1: Mean teacher vacancies by school pupil characteristics, in junior basic schools, Bijnor district, 2001**

Pupil proportions	Muslim	Dalit
0-24.9%	0.32 (N=815)	0.62 (N=396)
25-49.9%	0.74 (N=304)	0.63 (N=433)
50-74.9%	0.96 (N=170)	0.56 (N=402)
75-100%	1.1 (N=146)	0.33 (N=204)

*Source:* DPEP data-set

**Table 2: Mean number of school facilities in junior basic schools, by school pupil characteristics, Bijnor district, 2001**

Pupil proportions	Muslim	Dalit
0-24.9%	3.31 (N=815)	3.24 (N=396)
25-49.9%	3.52 (N=304)	3.43 (N=433)
50-74.9%	3.42 (N=170)	3.45 (N=402)
75-100%	3.29 (N=146)	3.29 (N=204)

*Source:* DPEP dataset

Schools might, of course, have few facilities or many teacher vacancies for other reasons, such as their distance from towns. The database allows us to check this possibility. Table 3 shows that there is a weak negative relationship between distance from town area and the mean number of facilities ( $R = -0.103$ ).

**Table 3: Facilities and teacher vacancies in junior basic schools, by distance from town area, Bijnor district, 2001**

School location	Mean number of facilities	Mean number of teacher vacancies
In town area (N=33)	4.25	1.65
1-5 km from town (N=390)	3.46	0.09
6-10 km from town (N=594)	3.34	0.60
More than 10 km from town (N=438)	3.20	0.89
Distance not stated (N=21)	0.24	0.33

*Source:* DPEP dataset

There is also a negative relationship between distance from town area and the number of teacher vacancies ( $R = -0.148$ ), but this result is clearly generated by the unexpectedly large number of teacher vacancies in town areas themselves. This out-lying result is surprising: most accounts of teacher preferences (and of the superior ability of urban residents to demand adequate facilities for their schools) suggest that schools in urban areas should be better resourced than those further away. Our interpretation is that it reflects an unwillingness of Hindu teachers to serve in schools dominated by Muslims. Bijnor district's 27 town area

schools that have any pupils (6 have none) have a majority of Muslim pupils, with an average of 62.8 per cent (approximately equal to the Muslim share of Bijnor district's urban population, at 66.8 per cent). They have 11,202 pupils in total (an average school population of 414.9) and 129 teachers (a pupil-teacher ratio of 86.8) with 45 teacher vacancies.

Our data for the Haldaur and Mohammedpur Deomal Blocks allow somewhat more refined analysis. In 2001, these two blocks had a combined population of about 465,000.<sup>11</sup> Including Bijnor town (50 per cent Muslim in 1971), we estimate the catchment area for primary schools in the two blocks in 2001 was about 40-45 per cent Muslim, about 25 per cent Dalit, 10-15 per cent OBC, with the remainder caste Hindus. The number of junior basic schools in the two blocks rose from 181 in 1981 to 266 in 2001: Table 4 shows the distribution of enrolled pupils by caste/religious classification. The share of Dalit and OBC pupils exceeds their share in the population of school age; the share of Muslims and 'Others' is below their expected enrolment. The number of girls exceeds that of boys in all but the 'other' category. We interpret these findings as a reflection of the extent to which government schools are increasingly 'residual' (many wealthier parents have withdrawn all their children from Government schools, and others are more likely to pay for boys than for girls to attend unaided non-state schools). It may also reflect campaigns preceding DPEP (but stepped up since DPEP was introduced) to increase girls' enrolments, including offering free schooling for girls. We are uncertain how much effect on school enrolments these campaigns would have had by 2001.

**Table 4: Pupil characteristics in junior basic schools, Haldaur and Mohammedpur Deomal Blocks, Bijnor District, 2001**

	Muslim	Dalit	OBC	Other	All
Girls	7,938	10,274	4,736	1,283	24,231
<i>Percent</i>	<i>(33%)</i>	<i>(42%)</i>	<i>(20%)</i>	<i>(5%)</i>	<i>(100%)</i>
Boys	6,230	10,009	4,578	1,505	22,322
<i>Percent</i>	<i>(28%)</i>	<i>(45%)</i>	<i>(21%)</i>	<i>(7%)</i>	<i>(100%)</i>
All	14,168	20,283	9,314	2,788	46,553
<b><i>Percent</i></b>	<b><i>(30%)</i></b>	<b><i>(44%)</i></b>	<b><i>(20%)</i></b>	<b><i>(6%)</i></b>	<b><i>(100%)</i></b>

**Source:** DPEP dataset

Because we know the characteristics of villages in these two blocks, we could control somewhat for the possibility that in any particular school the pupil characteristics might be very different from those of the catchment area.<sup>12</sup> We find the same results in these two blocks as in the District as a whole: there are positive relationships between the proportion of a school's catchment area who are Muslim, and the chances of teacher vacancies and of high pupil-teacher ratios. There are negative, but not statistically significant relationships between, on the one hand, Dalit and OBC catchment areas and, on the other, teacher vacancies, pupil-teacher ratios, and indicators of schooling quality.

Finally, we can tell something from the schools selected for up-grading under DPEP. Fifty schools are listed for improvement. Eleven of these are from town areas. According to

<sup>11</sup> The 1971 Census did not provide data by religion at the block level.

<sup>12</sup> In Qaziwala primary school, for example, 52 of the 143 pupils (36%) are Dalit yet the three closest villages in the catchment area are 90% Muslim.

current pupil enrolments, 22 of these schools are not functioning. The pupils of the other 28 are divided as follows: 33.8 per cent Muslim, 32.0 per cent Dalit, and 30.3 per cent OBC. Once again, this limited evidence suggests that in implementing DPEP there is an attempt to overcome some of the disadvantages faced by Dalit (and possibly OBC) pupils, but not to deal with those faced by Muslims.

In summary, the evidence from the data on government junior basic schools is consistent with the following account. Firstly, that government primary schooling facilities have been of generally poor quality: by 2001 few of Bijnor's residents would see a government primary school as a great asset in itself, though for many it was welcomed as a source of mid-day meals and scholarships, and occasionally of worthwhile education. Within this fairly dire picture, however, it is still clear that primary schools were often located in places that are less accessible to Muslims than to other groups. It may be that in the early post-Independence period similar discrimination (whether overt or unintentional) had affected Dalit populations in similar ways. Dalit populations in Bijnor mostly live in villages with other (OBC or higher caste) Hindus, and government schemes have attempted to reduce the social exclusion of Dalits, and there is no longer evidence of such exclusionary processes affecting Dalit children. But there is systematic (but not conclusive) evidence that even where government primary schools have been established in places that are accessible to Muslims, they have been provided with poorer facilities. Furthermore, teachers have been less willing to serve in these schools (or bureaucrats have been less willing to insist on teachers serving in them) and so section sizes have been higher in schools that attract substantial numbers of Muslim pupils than in other schools.

Since the early 1990s, however, as in other parts of north India, primary schooling has been increasingly privatised. Small, often unrecognised primary schools have sprung up in villages as well as in towns. Unfortunately, although DPEP was supposed to collect data on these schools, this is of very poor quality. Evidence from the private primary schools serving the villages where we have done fieldwork over the past 20 years suggests that the availability and quality of these schools are much more closely linked to parents' ability to pay: the market discriminates only on a monetary basis. But we can also see that these new schools are more likely to be socially unidimensional than government schools: they are more likely to serve particular castes or religious communities, with relatively little social mixing. We can say more about the effects of privatisation in secondary schools, however, to which we now turn.

#### *Secondary schooling: rising privatisation*

Secondary schooling (classes 6-8 and 9-12) is extremely important, since the benefits of schooling—in terms of employability or of secure literacy with a wide vocabulary—only emerge after at least eight years of schooling. With respect to secondary schooling, Muslims are generally under-represented in part because primary school provision has already excluded significant numbers of Muslim children from formal education. But some further processes of social exclusion can be seen at the secondary level, whether we consider government, aided or private schools. Here we draw on two main sources: our detailed fieldwork from four villages, and data collected in 2001-02 from all secondary schools serving Bijnor town.

As we have described above, in UP the trajectory of government involvement in secondary schooling shows a marked shift around 1975. Before then, it can be argued that there was a steady effort to increase the numbers and coverage of Government and Government-aided secondary schools—even if the effect of this policy was counter to equity



and efficiency goals. Since 1975, however, the Government has opened only three schools teaching to classes 10 or 12 in Bijnor.<sup>13</sup> It has opened too few new schools to meet the increasing demand for secondary schooling, it has not funded additional classes in Aided schools, not provided extra teachers as pupil numbers have increased, and not refilled all the posts that have become vacant. Also, since 1975 very few schools in Bijnor have been added to those receiving Government aid,<sup>14</sup> and schools aided for a certain number of teachers (for example, for classes 6-8) have not been assisted for any other classes they may have opened.

In Bijnor, different kinds of schools have responded differently to the challenges posed by these shifts (see also Kingdon, 1994). Most Government Junior High Schools have been allowed to decline to a parlous state. In some there are one or two teachers in post but no pupils. In general they seem to match the familiar picture of primary schools drawn for the large north Indian states (The Probe Team, 1999). By contrast, many Aided schools, whether Junior High Schools or Inter-Colleges, have responded to the declining numbers of teachers being funded by the Government by charging pupils illegal fees and appointing teachers on temporary contracts and low rates of pay. In the 16 Government and Aided High Schools and Inter-Colleges in Bijnor town and the two Development Blocks of Haldaur and Mohammadpur Deomal, about 408 teachers are employed, of whom 296 are on Government salaries and at least 112 (27 per cent) are paid by the management committee or by the school PTA (Parent-Teacher Association). There has been an absolute decline in the number of Government-funded teachers in Government and Government-Aided schools. Between 1991 and 2002, increasing numbers of permanent posts have been left unfilled as teachers retire, are transferred or promoted. Replacement teachers are increasingly slow to be appointed, and there are many vacancies: in Bijnor District in 2002, 53 per cent of posts of Principal, Head Teacher or Vice-Principal in Government and Aided Junior High Schools, High Schools and Inter-Colleges and at least 17 per cent of the posts of Lecturers and Assistant Teachers were vacant. The reported 1915 teachers paid by the Government in Government and Aided High Schools and Inter-Colleges in Bijnor District in 1995-96 had declined by 2001-02 to 1646, a drop of 14 per cent.

More energetic still have been the responses of private individuals and groups who have established new schools to meet the growing demand. At the end of 2001 there were 33 institutions providing secondary-level schooling either in Bijnor town or within 5 km of its outskirts. Five of these were government schools; seven were government-aided; and 21 (all established after 1975 and co-educational at least in some classes) were private, without any form of Government support.<sup>15</sup> All schools founded before 1975 follow the UP Board Hindi curriculum, but of the 21 schools founded in or after 1975, only twelve follow the UP Board curriculum, six follow the English-medium CBSE curriculum, one the CBSE Hindi-medium curriculum, and one is affiliated to the ICSE. In one school a mixture of curricula is followed, with English-medium and Hindi-medium classes side by side. Table 5 shows that by 2001-02, 30 per cent of students in classes 6-8 in Bijnor town were in unaided English- and Hindi-

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<sup>13</sup> In this period, though, some Aided schools were transferred to Government ownership and management because of factional fights on their management committees.

<sup>14</sup> Between 1991 and 2002 some Aided schools in Bijnor that had been the responsibility of the BSA were transferred to the responsibility of the District Inspectorate of Schools as they expanded and included secondary classes.

<sup>15</sup> In one school, classes are co-educational to class 5 but only for girls in classes 6-8; in another, classes are co-educational until class 8 but only for girls in classes 9 and 10.

medium secondary schools, but only 6 per cent of those in classes 11-12. In other words, the children admitted to the new unaided schools are only just reaching the higher classes in the secondary schools in Bijnor (19 of these 21 private schools were established in 1987 or after).<sup>16</sup>

**Table 5: Percentages of pupils in secondary schools of different management, Bijnor town, 2001**

Classes	6-8	9-10	11-12
Aided schools	38.5%	53.9%	50.7%
Government schools	31.5%	34.2%	43.1%
Private English-medium	17.5%	11.0%	6.2%
Private Hindi-medium	12.5%	0.8%	0.0%

**Source:** School records, data collected by authors in 2001.

Similarly, the figures for Bijnor District (Table 6) show the rapidity of growth rates of children in classes 10 and 12 in Unaided schools: over a five-year period from 1998-99 the proportion of 10<sup>th</sup> class examinees from unaided schools rose from 11 per cent to 38.5 per cent, and the proportion of 12<sup>th</sup> class examinees rose from 1 per cent to 13.9 per cent.

**Table 6: Distribution of pupils taking the UPSEB Examinations from Bijnor district, 1998-99 to 2002-03**

<i>Schools</i>	Distribution of registered pupils				
	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
<b>10<sup>th</sup> class pupils</b>					
Government Schools	12.5%	11.7%	11.9%	9.8%	8.7%
Aided Schools	76.5%	67.6%	64.5%	56.1%	52.8%
Private Un-aided Schools	11.0%	20.7%	23.6%	34.1%	38.5%
Total	18616	13852	19384	25815	26961
<b>12<sup>th</sup> class pupils</b>					
Government Schools	12.0%	11.7%	10.2%	9.9%	9.0%
Aided Schools	77.8%	72.0%	68.3%	68.7%	64.5%
Aided to lower levels	9.3%	12.3%	13.5%	11.2%	12.6%
Private Un-aided Schools	1.0%	4.1%	8.0%	10.3%	13.9%
Total	11597	9458	11374	10855	10432

**Source:** District Education Office, Bijnor

How does this shift to private schooling affect different social groups in Bijnor? The figures in Table 7 suggest that, despite the smaller numbers of Muslim children accessing adequate primary schooling, Muslim girls (in particular) are better represented within the government and government-aided secondary schools that serve Bijnor town than in the unaided schools, whether English- or Hindi-medium. But in all three kinds of schools, far fewer Muslims are enrolled than their proportions in the catchment area would suggest. Dalit children, by contrast, seem to be roughly equally represented in the public and private Hindi-

<sup>16</sup> We do not know, of course, about schools that have opened and already closed, but we suspect that there are very few in this category. We have incomplete data on six of the schools: they did not provide the caste and religious breakdown of students, mostly in classes 6-8.

medium schools. (The English-medium schools did not provide data by caste for Hindu pupils.) Similar patterns emerge when we consider the caste/religion of the teachers in these schools (Table 8). All but one of the Muslim male teachers in the aided school category worked for the single minority boys' Inter-College institution; all but three of the Muslim female teachers worked for the single minority girls' school. All but four of the Muslim female teachers worked in Muslim-run private institutions: there were no Muslim male teachers in the private schools.

**Table 7: Distribution of Muslim pupils by School type, Bijnor town, 2001-02**

Pupils	Hindu and others	Dalit	Muslim	Total
<b>Government and Government aided schools</b>				
Girls	2970 (50%)	888 (15%)	2084 (35%)	5942 (100%)
Boys	3499 (57%)	1249 (20%)	1369 (22%)	6117 (100%)
<i>All</i>	<i>6469 (54%)</i>	<i>2137 (18%)</i>	<i>3453 (29%)</i>	<i>12059 (100%)</i>
<b>Unaided English-medium schools</b>				
Girls	284 (87%)		43 (13%)	327 (100%)
Boys	581 (83%)		123 (17%)	704 (100%)
<i>All</i>	<i>865 (84%)</i>		<i>166 (16%)</i>	<i>1031 (100%)</i>
<b>Unaided Hindi-medium schools</b>				
Muslim-run	0	18 (10%)	178 (90%)	196 (100%)
Dalit-run	4 (15%)	19 (70%)	4 (15%)	27 (100%)
Hindu-run	574 (78%)	106 (14%)	57 (8%)	737 (100%)
<i>All Hindi-medium</i>	<i>578 (60%)</i>	<i>143 (15%)</i>	<i>239 (25%)</i>	<i>960 (100%)</i>

**Source:** Authors' survey of secondary schools, October-January, 2001-02. Caste/religion breakdown was not provided of 199 pupils in four Hindi-medium schools, and of 924 pupils in two English-medium schools. Most unaided English-medium schools denied they kept details on the caste of Hindu pupils, and identified Muslims from their names, whereas Government schools routinely report the background of students.

**Table 8: Distribution of teachers by School type, Secondary Schools serving Bijnor town, 2001-02**

Teachers	Hindu	Dalit	Muslim	Other	Total
Government schools	77.5%	6.3%	14.4%	1.8%	111
Government-aided schools	68.1%	2.2%	27.5%	2.2%	182
Private English-medium Schools		85.0%	12.2%	2.7%	147
Private Hindi-medium schools	74.5%	8.3%	16.6%	0.7%	145

**Source:** Authors' survey of secondary schools, October-January, 2001-02. Caste breakdown was not provided for 125 Hindu teachers in the English-medium schools.

What explains these patterns? In part it reflects the management of the 21 post-1975 schools. We classified these schools on the basis of the name of the schools, their managers and Principals, and the religion and caste membership of the teachers. Nine are founded, managed and run by upper-caste Hindus (Brahmans and Banias), and often include *Vidyā Mandir* ['knowledge temple'] in their names, or the name of a Hindu God. One of these is a

*Saraswati Vidyā Mandir*, i.e. a secondary school affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Seven attempt to appeal to a wide constituency, and include the words 'Public School' in their names, including one convent school. Four are Muslim foundations: one is on the same site as a *madrasah*, and shares a common management and some teaching; one is financed by the Muslim Fund Bank. The final school, named after Jagjivan Ram, claims to serve the Dalit community. At least four schools have apparently been established by families to provide employment and business opportunities for an educated wife or daughter-in-law. The pupil characteristics show some clear relationships with the caste/religious backgrounds of founders and managers, as Table 7 suggests.

To summarise, then, since the mid-1980s, shifts in the wider economy to market liberalisation have been reflected in the massive expansion of private and government-aided schools and colleges, either wholly or partially outside the state sector. These may compensate somewhat for the shortfall in state provision—but in a fashion that further reduces pressure on the state and fails to address questions of equitable access (Jeffery et al., 2007a; Jeffery et al., 2005b; Jeffery et al., 2007b). As a result, Bijnor is witnessing a rapid transformation of secondary schooling. The Government and Aided schools are undergoing creeping privatisation, as measured by the declining proportion of teachers paid by the Government, and by the increasing significance of the fees charged by these schools. And the new, private schools tend to be more socially exclusive, with the English-medium and some Hindi-medium schools discriminating just on the basis of fees, but others doing so in more or less subtle ways – whether the management is caste Hindu, Dalit or Muslim. These processes are allowed to continue because of Governmental failure to expand its support to secondary schooling, in the face of increasing demand. There is, however, little accountability from below or overt public protest about either the declining quality of state schooling or the practices of social exclusion that are emerging.

#### *Madrasahs as a least-worst option?*

Our account of the UP Government's failure to provide cheap and accessible state education and of the religious communalization of formal school curricula provides the backdrop for understanding the *madrasah* sector in Bijnor. There are now over 30,000 *madrasahs* in India as a whole (Sikand, 2005), and, as elsewhere in UP, sections of the Muslim élite have directed resources towards *madrasah* education mainly for their poorer co-religionists. This process has been encouraged by remittances from West Asia and the geographical spread of Islamic reformist movements since the 1970s (Engineer, 2001; Sikand, 2005) as well as by the gains from improvements in agricultural technology and agrarian commercialization between 1970 and the early 1990s, particularly in the more prosperous districts of the state (Sharma & Poleman, 1993). *Madrasah* funding relies on subscriptions raised through collection networks, predominantly local but sometimes more widespread. During Ramzān, for instance, *maulwis* teaching in *madrasahs* in Bijnor district routinely go on tour, often as far away as Mumbai and Surat, in their search for funds.<sup>17</sup> Muslims have rarely, however, been able to raise sufficient capital—for land, buildings etc.—for successful investment in 'mainstream' education (Engineer, 2001).

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<sup>17</sup> Other poor communities have generally not developed widespread alternatives to the state system along the lines of *madrasahs*. For Dalits, Ambedkar schools are less common than *madrasahs*, perhaps because of the scholarships to which Dalits are entitled in government schools, but Dalits also seem to lack networks with the geographical and economic spread of some Muslim networks and find it harder to fund such institutions for themselves.

Over fifteen *madrasahs* were established within 5 km of Bijnor in the late 1980s and 1990s, and existing *madrasahs* increased their pupil numbers, facilitated in part by the increasing funds available but also a reflection of the expanding cohorts of school-age children and the increasing demands for formal education from Muslim parents (Jeffery et al., 2007a). Amongst Muslims in Bijnor district, the influence of *Daru'l 'Ulum* seminary in Deoband is decisive: there is only a limited presence of Shias, Bareilwis and representatives of other strands of South Asian Sunni Islam. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, seminaries such as Deoband had begun developing networks of outreach to the rural areas (Metcalf, 1982: 248), and the *madrasahs* in contemporary Bijnor are basically under Deobandi influence, through inspections of the Urdu, *Qur'an Sharif* and other teaching by Deoband staff, by despatching some senior pupils to study there, or by recruiting teaching staff [*maulwis*] from Deoband itself or from other *madrasahs* within its ambit. Many *maulwis* originate from Bijnor district itself, some from relatively poor urban backgrounds, others from rural households (usually ones owning small amounts of land). A few are from impoverished families in places such as eastern UP and Bihar and have studied in boarding *madrasahs* since childhood (see Jeffery et al., 2004, 2005a, 2006). Several of these *madrasahs* offer the UP Board curriculum alongside religious subjects and thus cater for Muslim students unwilling to attend Hindu-dominated schools but keen to acquire 'mainstream' qualifications. Just outside Bijnor town one educational entrepreneur had built side-by-side a secondary school offering 'mainstream' subjects (mentioned above) and a *madrasah* specializing in the teaching of Urdu, Persian, Arabic and *Qu'rān Sharif*.

During our research, we have had numerous conversations with village parents in Bijnor as well as with *maulwis* teaching the local *madrasahs*. Many Muslim parents were keenly aware of the potential capacity of mainstream education to improve their children's lives, stressing the role of formal school education in providing valuable skills, training and manners. Indeed, during the 1980s and 1990s, an increasing number of Muslim boys had acquired some mainstream education and remained in school up to secondary level, generally following the UP Board Hindi-medium curriculum (or occasionally an English-medium curriculum) and studying Urdu and the *Qur'an Sharif* with private tutors or by attending a *madrasah* before or after school. For the most part, though, these children were from the wealthier Muslim families in the villages, and even they typically lacked the social contacts to ease their entry into schools in Bijnor. For most Muslim parents, problems of access, ambience and affordability loom large in the explanations they give for sending their children for *madrasah* education. *Madrasahs* are locally accessible and, as Muslim parents often commented, provide children with an ethical training—that they consider to be absent from mainstream schooling—in an ambience that is not unsympathetic to Islam. Further, *madrasahs* do not levy fees from pupils and so are feasible sources of education for parents whose lack of resources leaves them little room for manoeuvre in planning their children's educational careers (Engineer, 2001; Sikand, 2001). And crucially, many Muslim parents were loath to invest heavily in mainstream schooling because they lacked the money and social contacts required to obtain salaried jobs for their sons. Rightly, Muslim parents did not perceive *madrasah* education as a passport to prestigious, well-paid employment—but they said the same of the rural schools to which they had access. Many rural Muslim parents—especially the poor—did not believe that their sons could make a transition into the labour force on favourable terms, because they lacked the necessary social contacts and financial resources (Jeffery & Jeffery, 1997: 179ff.). Like the Muslim villagers we talked to, the *maulwis* are convinced that Muslim ambitions in the wider world are routinely thwarted. For most *maulwis*, attaining high educational qualifications in the Hindi-medium schooling system would have been unaffordable, and the *madrasah* sector had provided a cheap or even free route to respectable—though rarely lucrative—employment they believe would otherwise have eluded

them. Some described their work as a way to earn them religious merit [*sawāb*]<sup>18</sup> in the afterlife, in the absence of good employment opportunities in this life.

In sum, then, choosing *madrasah* education for one's children or *madrasah* employment for one's self can rarely be constructed as a positive choice based on a single-minded desire for religious instruction instead of 'mainstream' education. Rather, these are choices made in the context of Muslims' systematic marginalisation from quality mainstream education and their poor employment opportunities. As Sachar (2006) concludes, *madrasah* education is more likely to be a last resort than the first choice of Muslim parents (see also Sikand, 2005 and Hasan and Menon, 2005). Similarly, Drèze and Kingdon (1998) consider that low school attendance rates among rural Muslims in India as a whole are due more to 'tangible disadvantages such as poverty and low levels of parental education than to parental opposition to schooling'. The evidence cited above with respect to government primary schools is consistent with these arguments: where Muslims have chosen *madrasah* education, this is as much because of the poor quality of Government schools—even poorer than for other groups—as because of a preference for *madrasahs* over 'secular' schooling. In an uncertain and often hostile world, *madrasah* education could provide some dignity and self-respect by giving parameters for the moral life in this world and an assurance of reward in the afterlife, if not in this one. The emphasis on self-improvement and personal reform, however, is a defensive and introverted strategy posing no direct challenge to the circumstances that perpetuate Muslims' educational and occupational marginalisation in UP, be these the domination of the education sector by Hindi-Hindu élites, the fiscal crises of the UP State, or the long-term consequences of the partial loss of Bijnor's Muslim elite in the 1940s and 950s.

### **Conclusion**

The problems of poor schooling, inadequate job opportunities, and corruption in recruitment to the more attractive sources of employment affect all Bijnor's young people (Jeffery et al., Forthcoming), but not equally. Thus, whilst some aspects of schooling provision in UP affect Muslims in particular ways, it is vital not to ghettoise discussion of Muslims' educational status. In other words, the educational experiences of Muslim children should be viewed within the wider perspective of educational provision in UP. By doing so, we separate out the long-term and deep-seated issues of institutional communalism in the education sector—not to mention other arenas of life in contemporary UP—from the general problems of overt and covert discrimination against the poor.

Could any of the current proposals—whether those made by the Sachar committee, or the promises of the Manmohan Singh government, or the suggestions made at the numerous workshops discussing the Sachar report—overcome the entrenched disadvantages faced by Muslims in western UP? Proposals to increase stipends and scholarships, to recruit Urdu-speaking teachers and provide good quality textbooks in Urdu, and to introduce and encourage "scientific and job oriented education" in *madrasahs* are unlikely to make a substantial difference to the employment prospects of Muslim children. Indeed, the further ghettoisation of Muslim children that would result might narrow the options open to them, given the significance of contacts in obtaining employment. In a context of rising privatisation, growing significance of English, and a continuing stranglehold by the Hindi establishment

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<sup>18</sup> This is another aspect of what we have called elsewhere the 'political economy of hopelessness': see Jeffery and Jeffery (2006), Jeffery et al. (Forthcoming), and Jeffery and Jeffery (2005).

over mainstream schooling, encouraging *madrasahs* to teach the general syllabus—so that certificates awarded by them are recognised by mainstream schools—makes sense, but will probably still leave *madrasah* pupils at a disadvantage compared to pupils able to afford English-medium schooling, for example. The best proposal—but one for which there is so far little evidence of public support—is to provide strong incentives for institutions to sustain a high level of social diversity. A second-best proposal, for substantial investment in minority institutions—calling on private Muslim as well as public sources of funding—would provide improved options for Muslim children, but at a cost in increasing the extent of educational separation. In any case, these options amount to little more than tinkering with educational provision. The policy options being considered currently remain very unclear, and none of them seem likely to be substantial enough to make a material difference to poor Muslims.

Furthermore, there are already indications of counter-resistance to the suggestions for remedying the decades of systematic exclusion of minorities from equal access educational facilities and employment. For instance, we have the unseemly spectacle of the communalist CD launched (but later denied) by the BJP as part of their election programme for the UP state elections in April 2007. The *Economic Times* has attempted to discredit all the evidence cited by Sachar that suggests that Muslims are economically disadvantaged. And there has been the (stayed) legal judgement at the Allahabad High Court that Muslims are no longer a minority in UP and thus are not entitled to special treatment—such as, presumably, the measures being discussed in the wake of the Sachar report. Given the hostility to preferential policies of any kind, the best that can be hoped for, it would seem, is that general policies of uplift and empowerment for the poor will be drafted in such a way that Muslims will be able to take advantage of them in full proportion. Such a prospect seems very distant, however.

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## **Endnotes**